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Viewing cable 10PARIS151, FRANCE AND NORTH AFRICA: CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
10PARIS151	2010-02-08 16:34	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

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<http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/170211/tunisie-wikileaks-portrait-dune-diplomatie-francaise-soumise-au-regime->

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8275
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 000151

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#) [TS](#) [MO](#) [LY](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: FRANCE AND NORTH AFRICA: CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

REF: PARIS 105

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathy Allegrone, Reasons 1.
4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: France currently has excellent relations with Morocco, tense ties to Algeria, an improving

relationship with Tunisia, and disappointing dealings with Libya, according to MFA North Africa DAS Cyrille Rogeau. In wide-ranging discussions during January, Rogeau and MFA Morocco Desk Officer Marie Buscail told poloff that France is now well placed to help Moroccan King Mohammed VI help realize his ambitious regionalization plan. They warned that both Morocco and Algeria are currently undermining progress in U.N. efforts to resolve the Western Sahara conflict, and they requested USG support in persuading both governments to adopt a more constructive approach; they also asked that we consult closely with the British to ensure that the MINURSO renewal goes smoothly in April. Although Franco-Algerian relations are ""frozen"" at the moment, Rogeau reported, bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism continues apace. Following a series of spats in 2009 regarding the persecution of journalists in Tunisia, French relations with President Ben Ali's government have begun returning to ""normal"" since the December visit to Tunis of the French Minister of Culture and Communication; GOF officials no longer mention the controversial case of Tunisian journalist Taoufik Ben Brik. French relations with Libya are ""stable"" at the moment, according to Rogeau, but the French are growing increasingly frustrated with the Libyans' failure to deliver on promises regarding visas, professional exchanges, French language education, and commercial deals. END SUMMARY.

MOROCCO -- FRANCE PLANS TO HELP RABAT WITH REGIONALIZATION

BILATERAL RELATIONS AND REGIONALIZATION

¶2. (C) ""With Morocco,"" according to MFA North Africa DAS Cyrille Rogeau, ""we discuss everything. We have our best relationship (in North Africa) with the Moroccans."" As Morocco's leading trade and investment partner, France is currently enjoying a high point in bilateral relations, according to both Rogeau and Morocco Desk Officer Marie Buscail. In fact, Buscail claimed France is now well placed to help Moroccan King Mohammed VI work toward his stated goal of devolving some power and authority from the central government to the provinces. France will have a role, she said, because regionalization will be a slow and difficult process for Morocco. Describing current Moroccan thinking about the subject as ""very confused,"" Buscail acknowledged one clear aim of the plan: the desire to press ahead with the Moroccan autonomy plan as a solution for the Western Sahara conflict. She also noted that an internal tension in the plan, between state-appointed governors and locally elected officials, remains to be resolved. Speculating as to the future structure of the provincial governments, she said Moroccan officials may create a system comprising nine new ""grand regions"" instead of the current 16 provinces. Some Moroccans have suggested that leaders of the new regions will be ""indirectly"" elected, i.e. appointed by directly elected councils.

¶3. (C) Having ventured these tentative views on the regionalization process, Buscail acknowledged that even reliable French contacts in Rabat remain unsure as to how regionalization will unfold. It is too early to tell, for instance, what role political parties will have in the new system. As the Government of Morocco works through these challenges, French officials have offered to help their Moroccan counterparts. Despite France's own highly centralized approach to governance, Buscail argued, French influence, training, and institutional exchanges will enable GOF officials to help their Moroccan counterparts develop some of the skills necessary to facilitate de-centralization. The French will also focus on judicial reforms.

INTERNAL POLITICS IN MOROCCO

¶4. (C) Commenting on Moroccan internal politics, Buscail speculated that the National Rally of Independents (RNI) seeks to form a unified position with the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), and they also seek to bring the Socialist Union of People's Forces (USFP) into this nascent

coalition. For RNI, the PAM connection seems certain, Buscail argued, but the USFP link may not transpire. In fact, she noted, some rumors circulating suggest that PAM may absorb RNI.

WESTERN SAHARA: MOROCCO NOT APPARENTLY MOTIVATED TO PROGRESS

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15. (C) Rogeau said the Aminatou Haidar affair has made the climate unfavorable for the next meeting on the Western Sahara. He argued that none of the parties seem to have a genuine interest in pushing the process forward at the moment, except those in camps and the Polisario: Morocco seems satisfied with the status quo, and Algeria profits from the freedom to lash out against both Morocco and France. The French have nonetheless recently encouraged the Moroccans to take a positive approach to the U.N. process.

16. (C) The Moroccans have begun preparing in earnest for the April renewal of the MINURSO mandate, according to Buscail. In fact, she reported that Moroccan officials have sought to introduce a complicating factor. They have posed a "hypothetical" request regarding Western Saharan refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria: would the GOF be willing to resettle some of them in France? Buscail claimed the Moroccans have put the same question to the USG, the UK, and other northern European countries. Describing the demand as unusually "direct," she noted that the Moroccans have nonetheless made similar "theoretical" requests in the past. This time the GOF responded by pointing out that they have not received requests from any refugees for resettlement in France; if they do receive such requests, they will assess them case by case. Buscail said OHCR representatives confirmed for French officials that the refugees themselves have not requested re-settlement. Moreover, she noted that France's tense relations with Algeria (see below) complicate the GOF position with regard to the Tindouf camps: "It would pose real problems for us with Algeria if we accepted any Tindouf refugees." She said the French would be interested to learn the USG response to the Moroccan request.

U.S., U.K., FRANCE MUST PREPARE NOW FOR MINURSO RENEWAL

17. (C) Rogeau said France is thinking ahead to MINURSO, and seeks to avoid what he referred to as the U.K. "surprise" that marred efforts to unify our positions last year, when the British suddenly objected to the text after the USG and France believed we had agreement. He said French officials have explained to their Moroccan counterparts the importance of undertaking internal reforms in order to empower France and other friends of Morocco to oppose any expansion of MINURSO's mandate. In addition to reforms, he said, the Moroccans are aware that they should avoid repeating the clumsy behavior that forced them to reverse their position with regard to Aminatou Haidar. Rogeau suggested the USG support French efforts to communicate to Morocco the link between their internal political reforms and the MINURSO renewal. The French also plan to ask the U.K. soon to clarify its position, and would like us to encourage the British not to propose last-minute changes, as they reportedly did last year.

ALGERIA -- REQUEST FOR HELP PUSHING ALGIERS ON W. SAHARA

GOF SEEKS HELP PUSHING ALGERIA ON WESTERN SAHARA

18. (C) In the lead up to the next round of talks on the Western Sahara, tentatively scheduled for February 9 - 11 in the U.S., both Rogeau and Buscail said the French have pressed the Algerians to adopt a more constructive stance toward the political process. Repeatedly describing the Algerians as "not very constructive," they said the Algerians profited from the December crisis surrounding admission of

Aminatou Haidar into Morocco by highlighting Morocco's human rights record in the Western Sahara. "We told the Algerians that we understood their message," Buscail said, "and that we have dialogue with the Moroccans about human rights, that we have not ignored the issue." She explained that the French worry that the Algerians may seek to continue focusing on the human rights question in the near future, instead of assuming responsibility for their part in resolving the conflict in the Western Sahara. "We have told them that our priority is the political process," she said. "It is the only way to guarantee respect for human rights (in the Western Sahara) in the long run."

¶9. (C) Buscail stressed that the French would like the USG to send the same strong message to Algiers. "Now is the time for us to try to convince Algeria to truly engage in the process," she argued. She reported that the French MFA has asked the French Embassy in Washington to deliver this same request to the State Department. Noting that while the Moroccans and Algerians have agreed to attend the February meetings, the Polisario has not yet affirmed its attendance, and Buscail said GOF officials will participate only if the Polisario does.

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BILATERAL RELATIONS "FROZEN" ...

¶10. (C) Rogeau was uncharacteristically stark and frank about the current "sad state" of Franco-Algeria relations. He employed words like "frigid" and "frozen" as well as "rather bad" to describe bilateral relations, which he said were simply "not moving." "All is blocked," he complained. As the principle cause for the impasse, he cited a precipitous deterioration since the August 2008 arrest of the Algerian chief of protocol, Mohamed Ziane Hasseni, for a politically-motivated murder he allegedly committed in Paris in 1987. Hassenni remained under judicial supervision in France until February 2009, but the judge has not yet delivered a verdict in the case. While Rogeau was unclear as to when this verdict might arrive, but said "the sooner the better." In addition, he said the Government of Algeria remains "very vexed" about allegations in France that the Algerian army participated in the murder of Tiberine monks murdered during the civil war of the 1990s. To distract attention from itself, the Algerian regime often attacks France or Morocco, noting the complicating factor that many Algerian elites remain francophile at the same time. They are, for instance, Rogeau argued, "more shy" in public about cooperation with Americans than they are about cooperation with the French, especially in the field of counter-terrorism (see below).

¶11. (C) Overall, Rogeau described a pervasive pessimism in the French MFA regarding Algeria: "It will take another general before normalization." Remarking on how "complicated" relations remain, he said the Algerians always focus on "what's not going right." For these reasons, among others, Algerian President Bouteflika has not visited France since President Sarkozy came to power in 2007. Nor has Sarkozy returned to Algeria since his two visits during 2007. Rogeau doubted that a visit will occur in either direction before the Hasseni affair is resolved.

... BUT CLOSE COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION CONTINUES

¶12. (C) Despite the problems, Rogeau insisted, Algeria has remained a reliable partner on counter-terrorism (reftel). He noted, however, that the French are surprised by the continual Algerian refusal to expand their cooperation beyond a bilateral setting. They will not, for instance, permit "trilateral" exchanges of information, among the U.S., France and Algeria, or the U.K., France and Algeria. The Algerians limit their counter-terrorism cooperation to bilateral contacts because, Rogeau speculated, they seek to maintain tight control over both their relationships and their own

counter-terrorism efforts. Still, he said this practice does not make sense because the Algerians likely realize that we -- French, British, and Americans -- exchange information among ourselves about terrorism in the Maghreb and the Sahel. The Algerians know that we all have the same enemy, objectives, and interests in this issue.

FRENCH INCLUDE ALGERIA AND LIBYA ON TRANSPORTATION WATCH LIST

¶13. (C) France has had the same problems as the USG with the fallout from announcements about new transportation regulations that target Algerian and Libyan citizens. The Ministry of the Interior (MoI) made a decision about which countries to include on the list without consulting the MFA, Rogeau reported. Then the French and Algerian press announced the news before the MFA could inform the countries concerned. As a result, the Algerians and the Libyans, among others, have protested their inclusion on the watch list vigorously in Paris, in their own capitals, and in the media.

TUNISIA -- BILATERAL RELATIONS BACK ON TRACK

¶14. (C) Rogeau claimed French relations with Tunisia have begun returning to "normal" since the December 2009 visit to Tunis of Frederic Mitterrand, French Minister of Culture and Communication. After a series of public spats during 2009, following the Government of Tunisia's strident reaction to French criticism of their treatment of journalists, Mitterrand's trip reportedly helped diminish lingering tensions. The French currently perceive Tunisia as the most stable country in the Maghreb, according to Rogeau. Compared to their North African neighbors, he argued, Tunisia has a highly educated population (only a seven percent illiteracy rate, versus 50 percent in Morocco), with the lowest unemployment in the region, and a bureaucracy that functions reasonably well. Tunisia's economy has a strong reputation in the region, as exemplified by the investment it has attracted from Gulf countries. Rogeau claimed Tunisians

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appear to perceive a link between the practices of a police state and successful economic development; as a result, they accept a form of social contract: in exchange for stability and growth, the population keeps quiet. Moreover, apart from Ben Ali's succession, the French do not believe Tunisia faces destabilizing changes in the near-term. At the same time, Rogeau observed, Ben Ali's approach entails significant risks, including the growth of a middle class that demands more political freedom, and the risk that economic growth will slow or stop. If the government stops providing financial and social security, it will have broken the unspoken contract and the population may become less docile.

¶15. (C) As to one of the journalists whom the Government of Tunisia has harassed and imprisoned, Taoufik Ben Brik, Rogeau described him as "not the best example" of journalistic integrity. Rogeau reported that French courts are also currently pursuing Ben Brik, for having allegedly attacked a Tunisian woman who has decided to press charges against him in France. Ben Brik, according to Rogeau, is very well organized, with many contacts in France whom he has activated on his behalf. Nonetheless, the French no longer discuss his case with the Tunisians, Rogeau said. (NOTE: After French Foreign Minister Kouchner mentioned the case of Ben Brik in an interview in November 2009, Ben Ali responded angrily, accusing France, for the first time, of hypocrisy in light of its colonial history in Tunisia, according to Rogeau and MFA Tunisia Desk Officer Clemence Weulersse. See Paris Points, November 13, 2009. END NOTE.)

LIBYA -- DISAPPOINTED IN TRIPOLI'S COOLNESS TOWARD FRANCE

¶16. (C) French relations with Libya are "stable" at the

moment, according to Rogeau, but the French are growing increasingly frustrated with the Libyans' failure to deliver on promises regarding visas, professional exchanges, French language education, and commercial deals. ""We (and the Libyans) speak a lot, but we've begun to see that actions do not follow words in Libya,"" Rogeau lamented. ""The Libyans talk and talk but don't buy anything (from us). Only the Italians land any contracts."" The French have made many gestures, Rogeau claimed, which they believe have not reciprocated by the Libyans. He did cite one sign of progress: during his U.N. speech, Libyan leader Qaddafi did not attack either France or the U.S. directly. ""This omission was rare. We took note."" Rogeau said France must be patient, but they will move forward ""with less enthusiasm than before.""

RIVKIN